Aruna Asaf Ali



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by Dhan

ARUNA ASAF ALI
A LIFE SKETCH

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DHAN

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INTRODUCTION

"Things are seldom what they seem, skim milk masquerades as cream" can truly be applied to Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali, one of the top-most leaders of the Congress Socialist Party. Her placid appearance belies the stormy impatience and restlessness of her soul, her tiny mouth holds a fluent tongue, her small head carries an active brain. She has taken millions by storm by her fiery speeches.

The famous wife of a famous man has not made a name for herself by blindly following in her husband's footsteps like Kasturbai Gandhi

or by sharing the burden of politics with her husband like Sucheta Kripalani. Aruna, though working for the same cause as her husband, has deviated from the beaten track and chosen an independent by-path to the tantalising gates of freedom. She has without hesitation and with dauntless courage expressed her difference of opinion with the seasoned leaders.

If ever she has been harsh and insolent to her elders and betters it is because she is sincere about making India free. If ever she has taken a hasty step it is because of her impatient hostility towards the foreign rule. If ever she has encouraged violence in the hearts of the Indian nation it is because she wants to drive the Britishers out of India at any cost.

The future historian may judge her harshly but we must remember that Aruna came forward at the time when the country was at the verge of political disaster. With her courageousness, selflessness and determination she sacrificed her all and kept the ball of Quit India rolling.

1

THE YOUNG DÉBUTANTE

FIRST GLIMPSE

"Here she comes", said one of the Press reporters. There was a bustle among the photographers who stood alert with their cameras as a taxi decorated with flowers drove in the compound of the Bradlaugh Hall in Lahore. Out stepped a petite woman in simple brown *chaplis*, clad in a white Khaddar saree and a beige coloured shawl thrown carelessly across her shoulders. Her underground activities told on her health. She entered the room smiling where journalists had assembled to hear what she had to say. This young rebel who felt that India should be made free, if necessary by revolution and who had been bold enough to express her disagreement with some of the topmost leaders of the Indian nationalist movement was no other than Aruna Devi as she now calls herself.

Aruna hails from a Bramahcharya family of Bengal. Her father Mr. Ganguli was a very intelligent man but he being a rolling stone failed to gather any moss. Her mother, the daughter of a Missionary was also a Bramahcharyist. She was a very quiet, affectionate and a homely woman. After marriage Mr. and Mrs.

Ganguli did not remain for long in Bengal. They spent most of the years at Kalka where Mr. Ganguli was in charge of the Kalka refreshment room.

Aruna the eldest child of the family of two girls and three boys was unassuming though obstinate as a child. Even in her childhood she loved to command. Her religious interest was aroused when at seven she went to visit some of her friends. To her, the offering of prayers to some Mysterious and Invisible Being called God was quite a novel experience. It was her first introduction to this Mysterious Being and she was eager to know more about Him.

SPELL OF THE CONVENT

Aruna and her younger sister, Purnima, received their early education in the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Lahore where their father was at that time working as a journalist. Aruna like her sister and brothers was surprisingly clever. She almost always topped the list in her class. "Irene" as she was known in school soon became quite a favourite of the Mother Superior who often related the stories of the sufferings of Jesus Christ to her students and gave the girls who were interested, biblical books to read. Young Aruna was so much taken up by the Roman Catholic religion and the secluded

life of the nuns that she herself began to think seriously of renouncing the world and adopting the black veil and the cross, taking the severe vows of celibacy, obedience and poverty and spending the rest of her life behind the formidable Convent walls. She spent many a sleepless, night not knowing what decision to make. Finally, she made up her mind to become a nun but when she broke the news to her parents they were shocked and scandalized. After giving her a sound scolding they had her removed from the Catholic atmosphere which in her parents, opinion had filled Aruna's little head with unbecoming and impractical ideas, and sent her to a Protestant school at Nainital where Mr. Ganguli had by that time opened a hotel. Aruna thus finished her education at Nainital.

ARUNA GROWS UP

Aruna grew up into a charming young woman. She was small and delicate with an olive complexion, small, black, deep-set eyes, and black, wavy, dishevelled hair which unlike other Bengalee girls was short and which to this day she has never been able to keep tidy. She even finds it difficult to keep the *pulla* of her saree on her head. Wearing pretty clothes was her weakness. Her taste in choice of her clothes

was most unique. She, even to-day is very particular about choosing simple yet fine Khaddar with artistic prints for her sarees. She pays great attention to personal cleanliness. In spite of her wearing pretty clothes and her sense of cleanliness she is inclined to be careless about the way she dresses. Her carelessness in dress, however, gives her a charming negligé appearance which only adds to her attraction and her exquisite personality. Being of a quiet temperament, she likes to be left alone. Like all solitude loving people she is a great lover of books. Books have always been her companions. Her collection includes classics, poetry, fiction, philosophy and politics. Her fine and convincing manner of speech is enough to captivate anyone. Even those who may differ in their opinion or disagree with her point of view like to listen to her attentively. Strong socialist-minded Aruna talks to any and everybody in her usual pleasant style.

The growing Aruna was a growing anxiety to her parents. Like all old fashioned Indian parents, they thought that it was high time they found a husband for their daughter. But Aruna, the born rebel was not going to take things lying down. Her English education had filled her receptive mind with Western ideas and she was not the one to accept the husband

chosen by her parents with philosophic resignation to fate, natural to her Eastern sisters. She left her home to earn her own living. She went to Calcutta and started teaching at the Gokhale Memorial School for Girls. Her chief ambition was to earn enough money to enable her to proceed to England for higher studies. But before she could earn enough money fate led her to a different path.

INTO THE ARMS OF MATRIMONY

A great change in her life came when she went to spend a part of her Summer vacation at Allahabad with her sister Purnima who had been married to a Bengalee gentleman called Banerjee. It was here that she met her Prince Charming—Asaf Ali. This young barrister with a flourishing practice in Delhi had then returned from Calcutta after attending a meeting of the Muslim League. At Allahabad, he intended staying for a short time with his very old friends the Banerjees. Asaf Ali was quite a well known figure even in those days. He had courted imprisonment in the days of non-co-operation in 1920 and was respected by all. His slow manner of speech, his Oscanian accent and his smart suit tailored by Asquith and Lord attracted Aruna. Besides, he like her was interested in English Literature. Both had many a drawing room

discussion on poets and authors. Little did Aruna guess at that time that she was slowly drifting into the arms of matrimony. These literary discussions brought the two young people close together and the result was a proposal of marriage from Asaf Ali and the acceptance by Aruna. As expected, Aruna's parents did not approve of this match. First of all there was the most important point—religion. He was a follower of Muhammad while she was a Hindu. Then there was a vast difference in their ages. He was forty-one while she only eighteen. Once again Aruna had to stand up against her parents and once again she succeeded in having her way. In spite of all obstructions the couple who found love, agreement and perfect harmony in their hearts was joined in matrimony. They had a quiet wedding only two relatives of Aruna and a few common friends being present at the marriage ceremony.

This inter-provincial and inter-communal marriage proved a great success. Aruna had made a wise choice indeed. She found the ideal man in Asaf Ali, as she herself tells us, "no husband could be more generous and liberal than Asaf Ali".

After marriage Mr. and Mrs. Asaf Ali shifted to Delhi. Aruna took a great interest in her new home and decorated it most taste-

fully. Asaf Ali who was a very popular figure in the society proudly introduced his Anglicised wife to his wide circle of friends. Aruna proved an excellent hostess and always appeared happy and blooming with life. She liked the social life she led.

Asaf Ali in his spare time used to write poetry in Urdu on his charming wife. He felt rather disappointed because Aruna, who had only a limited knowledge of Urdu couldn't appreciate her husband's poetry. Dr. Farid Ansari often teased her by saying " Bhabhi, when will you learn to speak Urdu ? Asaf Ali is writing so many poems on you that there is every liklihood of an ink famine. You, however, cannot understand his masterpieces". After being teased constantly thus, Aruna at last made up her mind to learn Urdu and she did with the help of her affectionate mother-in-law.

To-day, Aruna who does not know her mother tongue very well, because of her not having lived in Bengal for long, speaks perfect Urdu.

2

BUDDING POLITICIAN

FIRST TASTE OF JAIL LIFE

In the early days of her married life, Aruna was not at all interested in Indian politics. In fact, she had no sympathy whatsoever, with Indian aspirations. Her attitude towards Khaddarites was a mixture of ridicule and sneer. But when Gandhiji launched his salt tax campaign Aruna naturally drifted into the world of politics. Asaf Ali who had taken an active part in the *Satyagraha* was arrested. His arrest aroused the political instinct latent in her and she started her political career by making a fiery speech about the origin and significance of the rebellion of 1857. The Chief Commissioner of Delhi thought that he would scare this new comer in politics away by prosecuting her for being a vagrant, having no place of residence and ostensible means of livelihood and by ordering her to furnish a security for good behaviour. As the young revolutionary refused to grant a security she was arrested and sent to Lahore Jail for a year's imprisonment. After a

few months when under the Gandhi-Irvin Pact all the political prisoners were released the Government decided to detain Aruna. When Aruna's prison mates heard this, they refused to leave the jail, until Aruna was set free. The Superintendent of the prison was in a dilemma. He tried to argue with the ladies for about fourteen hours but all in vain. The women remained determined in their resolve. It was only when Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ansari intervened and sent telegrams asking them not to insist that they left the jail. Aruna's detention caused an agitation all over India. Finally the Government had to give in to the public. On being released, Aruna was given an enthusiastic reception by a large number of her friends including Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan outside the jail premises. One thing that amused and puzzled Aruna was the name of the jail. It was called Lahore Female Jail. Aruna remarked " why is this jail called a female jail ? why should it not be called a women's jail ? Surely jail has no gender."

In 1932 movement Aruna was again imprisoned and was ordered to pay a fine of Rs. 200. She refused to pay the fine and the police instead of getting the money from her husband walked away with some of her most expensive sarees which had been gifts from Asaf Ali. In those

days political prisoners in Delhi District jail had received a rough and a callous treatment. As a protest, bold Aruna went on hunger strike. Although she fell ill she kept up her fast until the jail authorities agreed to the demands of the political detenus. The government, however, tried to punish her by transferring her to Ambala jail which was a man's jail and where she was kept in solitary confinement.

BACK TO SOCIAL GAIETY

When the term of her imprisonment expired Aruna returned to Delhi and for the next ten years took no part in politics. She contented herself by leading a busy social life once again.

Mr. Asaf Ali who devoted most of his time to politics often had a number of friends visiting him while Aruna acted the charming hostess. But it was not very long before Aruna's dynamic personality compelled her to do something for her country. Although she had courted imprisonment twice mainly with the intention of keeping pace with her husband and her sense of loyalty to the Congress, she was by no means a political worker. Merely taking part in the annual session of the All India Women's Conference did not satisfy her desire, but she did not know in what way she could help the Indians to win their freedom.

GANDHISM OR SOCIALISM ?

Indian politics in those days were very confusing. It was not an easy matter for her to decide whether to follow Gandhism or Socialism. She spent some of her leisure time in making a deep study of politics and tried to form her own ideas about setting India free. Somehow, Socialistic ideas began to enter her head, she often said " There are a lot of things we have got to break. A lot of things that were taken for granted." By her entry into a Muslim family, she understood Muslim problems thoroughly well. She felt that the Congress many a time irritated the Muslims without being conscious of the fact. The Vidya Mandir Scheme she thought was the case of adding feul to the fire. The very name was objectionable and irritating. Her idea was that the Mogul period was an ideal period and those sentiments ought to be reawakened and revived with great intensity. She was of the opinion that not Ram Raj but the reign of Akbar and the Mogul period should be our guides. Urdu script, she thought should have an equal place with the Hindi script. " The trouble is," she would say, " nationalism is such a holy concept to Indians that they instinctively express their feelings towards it in religious symbol ism being the highest thing they know. Women go to jail as they would go to the

temple. Inevitably, the mode of thought is Hindu. They call on the name of God in their songs and so on. If we are to appeal to the Muslim masses, they must be approached in the idiom *they* will understand and we shall alienate them if we thoughtlessly go on like this. I know no offence is meant, but the point is that offence is taken." Thus she taxed her little brain trying to find a way out. It was only when she came in contact with people like Jai Prakash Narayan, Achyut Patwardhan and Ram Manohar Lohia that could she make up her mind and say " towards Socialism I shall march."

IMPRISONED AGAIN

In 1940 Gandhiji launched his Civil Disobedience Movement as a protest against the way India had been dragged into the war. The Mahatma was so keen to keep this *Satyagraha* pure and undefiled by the touch of those who believe in violence that only those who believed cent per cent in the Gandhian Constructive programme of the Congress were chosen. Mr. Gandhi himself selected the *Satyagrahis*. Mrs. Asaf Ali's name was also on the list. Little did Gandhiji guess at that time that this young follower of his would one day defy his non-violent creed and lead the British Government to a pretty dance.

By the end of the year Aruna was arrested in Delhi and sent to Lahore Jail. To her surprise it was still called the Lahore Female Jail! The Jail is now placated "Lahore Women's Jail"—thanks to Aruna.

Because of her desire to be left alone, she demanded a C-class cell instead of an A-class which she would have had to share. She decorated her cell with pretty curtains and made the place look gay. She used to spin but did not enjoy what she described as "ritualisation of spinning." Another thing which she did not like was their Sunday morning procession through the garden. Although she did not keep good health and had to live on a very simple diet, she never complained. Aruna seemed to have reminded herself "many a soul is far worse off than me." She was very helpful to the C-class prisoners. She tried to make them happy by giving them small things such as a comb or a skein of embroidery silk. But she was very tactful about the way she gave these presents. She did not let her generosity be mistaken for charity. Whenever there was trouble in the jail, either with the authorities or among the prisoners, Aruna was always ready to take the matter into her own hands and always succeeded in settling whatever the dispute. She held weekly meetings in which she related the

news of the week to all the women. She wanted to educate the women who had come to jail. She tried to explain politics to them. This proved quite a difficult task as even some of those *Satyagrahis* who had a devotion for Mahatmaji, knew hardly anything of politics and nothing at all of the world outside India.

HISTORIC A.I.C.C. SESSION

In August 1942 Asaf Ali took his charming wife to Bombay in order to attend the forty-fifth session of the All India Congress Committee. Asaf Ali had by then become a very prominent Congress leader. Aruna was her usual self-pleasant, graceful and social as ever. She was in fact one of the most prominent figures in the pandal that day. Little did she or any one else who saw her then realise that this young society lady would, on the following day make a name for herself in the political field.

On August 9, early in the morning all the important Congress leaders were arrested. When Aruna heard this she rushed to Bori Bunder where a special train was waiting to carry the leaders to an unknown destination. Aruna tried to enter the station but she was stopped by a Police Inspector with " we have no warrants for you." But she insisted upon entering the station in order to see things for herself. The

police inspector warned her, "You might be insulted," but Aruna turned a deaf ear to his warning and boldly made her way to the station. There she saw, "every carriage window framed a face known, respected and loved by millions." Gandhiji appeared grim and stern. Jawahar Lal angry—a lost-in-thought look in his eyes.

After the train steamed out of the platform Aruna drove back home. Her blood was boiling at the sight she had seen. "Pearl Harbour methods," she said "are anathemic when practised by yellow-skinned Japs. When employed to crush a revolt they signify fore-thought, courageousness and rulership. Entrenched authority—an usurper authority had decided not to allow freedom of movement, speech or action to natives demanding its withdrawal." As for herself she could not decide as to what action she should take. Since the Congress had not chalked out a definite programme she did not know how to implement the Quit India resolution of the Congress. "What should I do?" was what she kept repeating.

Finally she decided to go to the Gwalia Tank Maidan where Maulana Azad was to have performed the flag hoisting ceremony. But Azad was absent. She heard a Police Sergeant giving orders to hail down the flag which was

still unfurled. While the volunteers hesitated Aruna, who had been asked to preside over the flag hoisting ceremony declared that the Flag hoisting ceremony would take place as scheduled. As soon as Aruna had hoisted the flag the police released gas so as to scatter the crowd. But the crowd instead formed a procession and marched to the Congress House, mad with rage.

"It was one of the many processions," says Aruna, "that defied police lawlessness that day." What pained Aruna was when looking back at the Gwalia Tank Maidan she says, she saw "the white sergeant tramping on the flag that I had unfurled ten minutes ago." After seeing this humiliating treatment Aruna says "I vowed that I would help to tear up the British rule."

Aruna spent a few days in Bombay, Her dislike for the British rule turned to hatred when she saw the police impliciting a lathi charge on some of the poor innocent people and opening fire on the angry mob. Her feelings of non-violence were changed to the spirit of retaliation.

A FUGITIVE REVOLUTIONARY

Aruna went to Delhi knowing fully well that she would be arrested any day. She also realised that her arrest would mean the end of her work with which she had planned to implement the

Quit India resolution. Besides, the people who were now deprived of their leaders needed guidance, so she decided to go underground.

During her short stay in Delhi she tried to organise a powerful resistance movement among the Congress workers who were still out of jail. She delivered a message of hope and put new life in the students of Delhi.

After starting the Indian Resistance Movement in Delhi, she left her home town not knowing herself where she was going and for the next two and half years kept wandering from place to place in different disguises and led the life of a fugitive revolutionary.

3

ARUNA GOES UNDERGROUND

THE ELUSIVE ARUNA

The British Government on discovering that Mrs. Asaf Ali had disappeared, offered a reward of Rs. 5,000 for the capture of the young absconder. But she, each time, proved too smart for the C.I.D people who tried their best to hunt her down.

How she drove the police almost mad is evident from the report of a police officer who after making frantic efforts to trace Aruna said to his boss " as against nine of us who are searching for her, there are nine lakhs in Delhi alone to offer her protection and quarter. It is an uneven game and you cannot blame us if we cannot succeed."

When after the Bhansali demonstration three lady Congress workers met the Executive Councillor he seemed desperate and shouted "Take me to Mrs. Asaf Ali and I'll explain everything to her."

Nobody could say that they had met Aruna. Like the elusive Pimpernel, she was here, she was there, she was everywhere and yet she was nowhere.

There are a number of stories connected with her underground life. They tell of her sufferings, her sacrifices, her narrow escapes from the police and are enough to take one's breath away. Here are some of the stories.

Once she was warned that the place where she was putting up was no longer safe and that she should shift to some other place immediately. The notice was so short that she was at a loss to decide as to where she should go. Fortunately she got a brain wave. In the morning papers she had read an advertisement that an English family wanted an European paying guest. Aruna got into a taxi and dashed to the address advertised. The good old English lady was so captivated by Aruna's charming personality and manners that she decided to wave aside her stipulations in favour of an European boarder and accepted Aruna as her paying guest. When the police arrived in great truimph to arrest her they found to their bewilderment that the "mysterious bird had slipped out of their hands once again."

On another occasion Aruna fell ill. Dysentery from which she suffered was so serious that she was reduced to a bag of bones. Her underground comrades pressed her to take some rest and they arranged for her stay in a middle class family. On the second day a Government

official, a good friend of Aruna's paid a surprise visit to that family. Having known the family for a long time he walked into the house unannounced. To his amazement he found Aruna —the arch rebel. Aruna's host found himself in an awkward position but she came to the rescue of all. In her usual homely way she greeted him and talked to him as if he had come to her own house at Delhi. The officer instead of reporting to the police said that he had been "privileged to have lived for a few moments, at any rate, in the presence of living history."

Despite police and C.I.D vigilance Aruna once visited the residence of her sister, Purnima, where her mother was lying ill on her death bed. She could not, however, make it possible to be by the side of her mother during the last moments of her life.

After being released Asaf Ali went to Wellington Hospital for treatment. The police got the news that Aruna had gone to hospital to see her husband They hurried to the hospital but felt foolish on learning that the lady who had called on Asaf Ali was Aruna's sister from Allahabad.

When Asaf Ali flew from Bombay to Simla, a nurse had accompanied him. Some police official got into his head that Aruna was attending to her husband under the disguise of a nurse.

All sorts of enquiries were made so as to ascertain whether the nurse was real or false. Since the police could not come to any definite conclusion, a genius of the police official by a subterfuge got the measurements of the nurse. As the nurse was two inches shorter in height than Aruna, the police was finally convinced that the nurse in question was not Aruna unless she had chopped off two inches of her height.

Once, Mrs. Bhimani came to stay with Asaf Ali. An officer of the Viceroy's household got the hint that Mrs. Bhimani was in reality Aruna. He carried the photograph of Aruna in his pocket and by a clever ruse confronted Mrs. Bhimani at a tea party. He was surprised that the guest of Asaf Ali resembled Aruna so much except for the fact that Mrs. Bhimani was two nches taller than Aruna.

It is believed that more than half a dozen persons including an architect, a pilot officer, (Mr. Patnaik) a garage owner and a Secretariat official were detained in prison for a considerable time because they were suspected of having given shelter to Aruna.

Aruna while underground did very useful work for her countrymen. She and her colleagues toured the famine stricken areas often and tried to help the poor villagers by looking after their needs and also giving advice to the

poor families of political absconders. They organized radio stations to inform the people how their revolt was progressing.

It may be recalled that after the release of political prisoners in 1945 a meeting of Congress Working Committee was held in Calcutta. The most important resolution passed was the resolution on non-violence. Even the Viceroy had accused the Congress of its violent activities and had stated that the wife of a working member had organized a strong movement to sabotage the Government's war efforts through violent means. The Working Committee after a five-day session passed a resolution re-affirming the Congress creed of non-violence and emphasising the Congressmen to stick to the non-violent creed in the struggle for freedom.

The following is the text of the resolution on non-violence:—

"After the arrest of the principal Congressmen in the August of 1942 the unguided masses took the reins in their own hands and acted almost spontaneously. If many acts of heroism and sacrifice are to their credit there were acts done which could not be included in non-violence. It is, therefore, necessary for the Working Committee to affirm for the guidance of all concerned that the policy of non-violence adopted in 1920 by the Congress continues un-

abated and that such non-violence does not include burning of public property, cutting of telegraph wires, derailing trains and intimidation.

"The Working Committee is of the opinion that the policy of non-violence as detailed in the Congress resolution of 1920, since expanded and explained from time to time and action in accordance with it, has raised India to a height never attained before.

"The Working Committee is further of the opinion that the constructive activities of the Congress beginning with the spinning wheel and Khadi as the centre are emblematic of the policy of non-violence and that every other Congress activity including what is known as the parliamentary programme is subservient to and designed to promote the constructive activities as explained by Mahatma Gandhi.

"The Working Committee is of the opinion that civil disobedience mass or any other, meant for the attainment of freedom, is inconceivable without the adoption of the constructive programme on the widest scale possible by the masses of India."

Immediately after the conclusion of the Congress Working Committee the Congress President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad explained at a press conference the various resolutions passed by the Working Committee during its

present session.

The Congress President said that the resolution on non-violence was the most important of the resolutions passed in Calcutta during the last four or five days. "I emphasise," said Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, "the resolution is the most important one, because ever since the August 1942 struggle, people have begun to believe that the Congress creed of non-violence no longer binds the country in general and Congressmen in particular. There has been a growing feeling among people that it is not necessary to adhere strictly to the principle of non-violence in our struggle for political freedom. This is absolutely wrong. It is for the purpose of removing this confusion and misconception in public mind that the Working Committee has thought it necessary to re-affirm the Congress creed of non-violence once again. We have reiterated our faith in non-violence as the only means to achieve our political objective with all the strength possible."

ARUNA SPEAKS FROM—— ?

After reading this resolution of the Working Committee and the explanatory statement of the Congress President, Aruna Asaf Ali and Achyut Patwardhan sent from "somewhere in India" the following statement to Maulana Azad.

"The authors of the letter regard this resolution as a summary judgment upon the complete events of the past three years and request the Congress President to re-examine the issues more specifically and formulate specific charges and provide them with facilities on appearing before a duly constituted tribunal to vindicate their stand. The resolution they state is bound to be interpreted as a reflection upon their alleged lapse from the path of duty to the struggle for freedom and since they have no sense of wrong doing, they demand not merely a vindication of their self respect but also the respect that their point of view deserved in the ranks of the Congress."

The following is the text of the letter addressed to the Congress President by Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali and Mr. Achyut Patwardhan from " somewhere in India."

The President,

Indian National Congress

Dear Maulana Sahib,

We have read carefully the resolution of the Congress Working Committee on the subject of non-violence passed on 11-12-45. We have pondered the implication of the past three years and analyse its emphasis governing present policy and its significance in relation to any future struggle, in which the Indian people may

be involved. Your personal annotation of the same resolution issued in a press statement, has also clarified the perspective in which these policies are outlined. Since the resolution records the Congress Working Committee's considered views, events and developments of the past three years, with some of which we have been vitally concerned along with other colleagues, it becomes necessary to define our position unequivocally and to bear our share of responsibility for our policies and activities during the period of your incarceration.

The resolution states in the first paragraph that after the arrest of the principal Congressmen the unguided masses............acted almost spontaneously. This is not a complete accurate statement of facts. There were in Bombay about a dozen prominent workers from the various provinces who held responsible positions in the Congress organisation, after your arrest. Amongst us were several colleagues whose allegiance to Gandhiji's creed of truth and non-violence cannot be questioned. We were responsible along with these other colleagues for setting up an organization to convey what we believed to be necessary directions to thousands of Congress workers and others who were still out of jail and who were anxious to implement the resolution of 8th August, 1942. We all recog-

nised the urgent necessity of providing some guidance to the vast forces that were being unleashed, instructions, directives, appeals and proclamations and the day to day exhortations (broadcast by the Congress Radio) were issued from time to time after your arrest in the name of the All India Congress.

If we speak of our doings it is only with the desire to assume personal responsibility for whatever policies were formulated and implemented in the name of All India Congress throughout this entire period. Our authority for assuming such responsibility was never questioned and we received the unsinted support of large sections of our people.

The spontaneous response of the people to the Congress call to act as free men is the greatest phenomenon of recent history yet. Once they had set their marching foot upon the path of revolt, they clamoured for effective and undaunted guidance. They asked to be organized to whatever degree the terror regime would allow and their genius triumphed for a time over all the machinations and force of the white man's *raj*. With respect to dislocation, secrecy and intensive forms of social boycott and other attacks upon authority many specific instructions were issued. By large majority such advice was widely accepted.

With regard to non-violence, Congress policy has been mainly pragmatic. From time to time it has defined its scope within limits of practicability. The Working Committee has refused to follow in the past the strict logic of Gandhian non-violence. There are its resolutions on record to prove this opinion. We have been ourselves profoundly influenced by the social valves of Gandhiji's philosophy. But our acceptance of these valves is essentially pragmatic and electric. The recognition that we fight on unjust system than merely the personnel who admitted it, is the essence of our stress upon non-killing, respect for life and private property are also logical corollaries of the same.

These valves were stressed in all our directions issued under the Congress seal. Conditions of unprovoked military and police aggression, however, create situations which are by no means easy to cope with.

The register has often only two alternatives. To resist with all his might in whatever manner seems practicable or to submit. Under the severest tests the Congress name was never tarnished by the counsel of submission.

We took our eve from the Working Committee's resolution of July 1942.

"That all aggression must be resisted, for any submission to it must mean the degradation of

the Indian people and the continuation of their subjection. The Congress is anxious........to build resistance to any aggression on India by the Japanese or any foreign power."

We also took note of Gandhiji's well known observations upon Polish resistance. The offer of armed support to Britain under certain conditions was fresh in our minds.

Again, the agreement in principle, after your release to join the Executive Council of the Viceroy when all that remained of the war was the re-conquest of Burma and Indonesia, did not suggest that our approach was contrary to Congress policy, otherwise it would lead us to the fantastic conclusions that certain specific acts are only permitted in alliance with the British, but those same acts become unpermissible when employed against it. It is, however, quite possible that under specific circumstances, even on pragmatic grounds, there would be room for honest differences. All that we have expressed heretofore relates only to the events during your forced detention.

In so far as the resolution in question faces us with your considered judgement, we feel called upon to assume such responsibility as inexpiably devolves upon us. This is not intended to minimise the undoubted fact of vast elemental forces spontaneously released. All

the same we deliberately provided a few grains ot organisational direction to the thousands of tons of mass initiative for the lack of which this unrehearsed upsurge would have collapsed in a matter of weeks rather than months.

The Congress had proclaimed its resolve to launch a mass struggle on the widest possible scale on non-violent lines. " Every Indian who desires freedom and strives for it " was to be " his own guide, urging him on along the hard road where there is no resting place."

But it is obvious that initiative and organisation cannot be provided by each one for himself. A set of Congressmen and women sought to fulfil this obvious gap.

You have, however, deliberately ignored the fact that some of us have made a determined effort to provide direction and guidance in your absence. Further you are definite that the forms of resistance improvised were inconsistent with Congress policy of non-violence. This leaves us two loopholes. We can attribute all that happened to the spontaneous urge of a people's revolt of which we were on insignificant annoymous focus and treat your judgment as post factum advice for the guidance of future conduct.

We may in the alternative disown our share and accept your judgement in silence. Honest

conviction, however, prevents us from seeking this easier path. We were repeatedly warned that our activities might be disowned and our interpretation of the legitimate course of action repudiated. Nevertheless, we persisted in putting our faith upon one pragmatic test. " Whatever is calculated to sustain and effectively express the maximum potential resistance of the people and to vitalise their will to be free, is the legitimate path of resistance."

We feel an inner compulsion to reassert our conviction and stand by it and accept the consequences of such a step. We did not impose any dogmatic ritual of conduct upon our people. On the other hand, we studied their spontaneous improvisation with such powers of discrimination as we possess and strove to inform the widely separated storm centres of revolt with the experience and lessons gathered from far-flung sectors of resistances. Our directions have led thousands to risk their lives. It would be cowardice if we did not assume our share of guidance. We were not waging a private war upon the British System.

We submit the working committee have done less than justice to their own good name for undaunted partisanship of freedom's cause by dismissing the momentous events of the past three years as a series of impulsive and heroic

albeit undirected aberration. We remain unconvinced of our error although we may recognise the average element of mistakes which persists in all organisational executive efforts.

As for the immediate implications of the working committee's resolution, it will lead to a totally fallacious postulate that a people's revolt hinges exclusively upon spontaneity. "Those who call upon the people to stake their lives upon one moment of total revolt bear the self-chosen obligation to provide an unbreakable core of guidance through organisation for the interchange of information and direction and for great co-ordination of all the available sources of resistance." This is not less necessary and becomes even decisive when the pattern of resistance is essentially decentralised. The question therefore cannot be evaded whatever honest differences there may be regarding the technique of revolt.

For lack of this recognition we witness the depressing fact of outstanding organisational talent being diverted in a lop-sided endeavour to generate enthusiasm without a corresponding effort to convert it for revitalising the instrument of resistance.

Such a policy reflects an incapacity to comprehend the lessons that the last few years have learnt upon the understanding of the common-

est unknown resister. The paradox of praising the dead men as heroes while obliquely disapproving the efforts which they fearlessly undertook along with others also defeats the linking up of enthusiasm with action.

This particular form of rigidity has in the past alienated from the Congress many sturdy fighters. We therefore plead for a re-examination of these weighty issues more specifically.

The Congress has more than once sought the freedom to interpret the general policy of non-violence in a form not acceptable to Gandhiji. On the 27th July, 1940, at the A. I. C. C. session at Poona, the Congress president threw a revealing light on these matters.

" The Indian National Congress is a political organization pledged to win the political independence of the country. It is not an institution for organising world peace. Honestly we cannot go as far as Mahatma Gandhi wants us to go. Most of us felt that we were not able to take up the grave responsibility of declaring that we would completely eschew violence when we have to deal with widespread internal disorders in this country of external aggression."

In view of a succession of deliberate deviations from the straight narrow path of non-violence some of which were initiated by Mahatma Gandhi himself (the Gelder statement

dated July 2, 1940), it seems a little difficult for us to appreciate the relevance of this one-sided stress upon the implications of non-violence in the context of a total struggle.

We wish to make it plain that there is no influential section of political workers who advocate terrorism. The country in its upsurge of enthusiasm to-day recognises the crying need for organising all available resources without which any heroic resistance would be nine days wonder.

It is this organization that is grievously neglected in the dust of election mock fights. We hope the threats uttered by the Secretary of State and repeated by the Viceroy and some Governors about closing the door of peaceful negotiations have not indirectly evoked this gesture of good behaviour.

We only hope our fears are without foundation.

4

FREE AGAIN

ARUNA SPOTTED

On January 25, 1946, it was officially announced that the warrants of arrest against Aruna Asaf Ali were cancelled. The two cases pending against her ; firstly alleged dissemination of prejudicial literature which was found in Aruna's writing in a house in Koral Bagh, and which, it is alleged, was intended for publication, secondly, failure to surrender herself to the authorities as required by the order of the chief Commissioner of Delhi, were also withdrawn.

It is amusing to note that although the higher authorities had cancelled the warrants against Aruna's arrest, the Court of Additional District Magistrate, Delhi, was quite ignorant of the fact. They still claimed Aruna as an absconder and would not give up her house in Delhi.

Four days after the cancellation of the warrants Aruna was spotted in Calcutta, by a reporter of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, driving home in a taxi. She appeared very much re-

duced. The excited reporter pressed her for a message and modest Aruna replied, "there is no question of feeling jubliant, leaving one's staunch comrades behind and I am not feeling happy at regaining the so called civil liberty. While in India there are others in prison for doing what I and my other colleagues did who have yet to regain freedom, you cannot possibly expect to see me elated. If anything, I am depressed." She added that nothing personal should be mentioned about her as those were not the times for personal things. Speaking of her comrades who were still underground she said that they did not expect any magnanimity adding "we don't expect any quarter nor shall we give any." She said that she had done useful work while underground and intended carrying on that work, the only difference was that she would now work openly.

Aruna was rather anxious to meet Gandhiji and have a talk with the father of the nation. It may be mentioned that the Mahatma while in detention in the Agha Khan Palace, in his letter to the Viceroy had condemned the violent action of those who were conducting the movement in the name of the Congress. After his release he had requested the underground workers to surrender themselves to the police. Few had responded to Gandhiji. Since Aruna had not

listened to him she felt it was her duty to meet the Mahatma and explain to him what had kept her and some of her comrades underground. She was disappointed to hear that she could not have an urgent meeting as the Mahatma was on a tour to Madras. She sent him a telegram saying: "Desire to seek your blessings and pay my respects, please wire when and where it is possible."

CALCUTTA HONOURS ARUNA

Calcutta can boast of being the first city in India to hear Aruna's voice after an interval of three and a half years. A public meeting was held at Deshbandu Park where Aruna spoke to a large number of people from the land of her birth. The platform on which she stood had been most exquisitely designed by New Theatres Art Director, Souren Sen. The snow white platform represented the truth on which those who were fighting for freedom of India pinned their faith for final victory. The martyr's memorial, ten feet high, consisted of a red winding pathway representing the youth climbing high and stopping at the foot of a white light, red representing the blood of the martyrs and the white light, the goal yet to be reached.

Aruna spoke to the eager crowd for more than one hour mostly in Hindustani, intimitantly in English and Bengalee. She called upon the

people to boycott English goods. Criticising Lord Wavell's speech in the Central Legislative Assembly she said that there was no need for the British Government to fix a date for India's freedom, the Indians would settle it all themselves. Being an enemy of the capitalists, she pointed out that she wanted the common man to be the real master of India. Bearing this idea in mind, she said, in the negotiations for India's political settlement which were afoot the people must remember that under any negotiated settlement, power only went to the powerful, but the power achieved through struggle remained with the people. The Indian masses therefore, she appealed, should carry on the struggle for freedom.

Aruna's admirers pressed her for a message and this is the message she gave them. "Messages fom politicians are appreciated. For one who is essentially a field worker it strikes an odd note. However, if Bengal can give the lead in reviving Swadeshi movement of 1905 in 1946 spirit and bring about a total boycott of British goods, to some degree the Bengal famine deaths will have been avenged. Those haunting cries refuse to grow faint. Let us not stifle them." The terrible picture of the Bengal famine was still fresh in her mind so she asked her contrymen to avenge the wrong done to the people in

famine days. In a pathetic tone she related that during the famine days, one night while walking along the road she stumbled over something and to her horror found that it was a dead body. The cries of the hungry people were still ringing in her ears. She believed that the British Government would have to answer for this deed some day. "If not you and I," she said, "the future generation will see that these deaths are avenged."

Aruna had been asked over and over again by the Assam co-workers to visit their province. But as Aruna was leaving for Delhi, she expressed her inability to do so and wrote a letter to them saying "you can imagine my disappointment at not being able to be amidst you immediately. Although Assam and I have not known each other before 1942, it seems as if you were always known to me. As soon as I am in a position to make my programme for February, I shall let you know exactly when to expect me."

HOMEWARD BOUND

Aruna left Calcutta for Delhi on January 31, 1946. She was given a hearty send off at the Calcutta Railway Station. Originally she had planned to go straight to Delhi but on receiving a telegram from Pandit Nehru asking her to break her journey at Allahabad, she decided to

do as he wished.

At every station crowds came to greet her. Even villagers, young and old, flocked to have a *darshan* of the heroine of 1942 revolution.

As the train, steamed in at Allahabad thundering shouts of " Aruna Zindabad" were heard. Many important Congressmen including Pandit Nehru were present at the station to receive and garland her.

HOMAGE TO HER DEAD MOTHER

A short time after her arrival, Aruna visited the room where her mother had expired. She stood for a moment outside the room then as she entered with slow determined steps, her old maid servant Basanti came and fell at her feet saying, " Ma Nahi" meaning mother is no more. Aruna whose heart was already heavy, at these words gave vent to her feelings and burst into tears. The scene touched Basanti and Purnima who were standing nearby and they also began weeping.

In the afternoon Aruna addressed the students at Parshotamdas Tandon Park. Speaking of some of the politicians who merely sit back and criticize the action of the leaders, Aruna said, "Let us all do our duty and not indulge in useless mutual criticism. If Gandhiji the father of the nation gives a programme you dare not doubt

his wisdom and dare not refuse to follow him. If Patel, the country's captain asks you to abide by certain decision, you dare not refuse him. If Nehru, the real leader of the people commands you to do certain things you dare not doubt his wisdom and sincerity".

Referring to the 1942 movement she said that it had shown the way to get freedom from unwilling hands. Although they had not achieved the goal they would not lose courage. She told the students that she could not tell them in detail what work she had been doing except that she had made a humble contribution on her part. She urged the students to sustain moral and revolutionary potentialities of the people which had come to the fore since the 1942 movement. She reminded the students that merely shouting slogans would not help in getting independence. What was more important, she said, was immediate, strong and revolutionary action, "Freedom's way is through battle," she said. She warned the students to be prepared for the coming battle. " Freedom's battle ", she said, " has to be fought and won by the strength of the people. Britishers will not free India voluntarily, you have to work for it and the strings of your bondage will be relaxed only when you are able to demonstrate your might and main beyond all-doubts." Concluding, she said " Do or die"

was the *mantram* given by Gandhiji and she proposed to live up to it."

On her way to Delhi from Allahabad, at a small station some soldiers of the Punjab Regiment headed by some officers approached Aruna and said, " what is your message for us ?" Aruna replied at once "you must not charge on your unarmed brothers. This is my first advice. The second advice is organise boycott of foreign goods."

Mr. Asaf Ali went to Ghaziabad to meet his devoted wife. This meeting of the couple after three and half years was very touching indeed.

At Delhi Railway Station, outside as well as inside, crowds and crowds of people gathered to greet this heroine. As the train stopped at the platform the enthusiastic crowd cheered her heartily. With much difficulty she managed to descend from the train and allowed herself to be garlanded responding with folded hands and her sweet smile.

Once outside the station she addressed the crowd with the words :—

"Do not glorify me. You must glorify the martyrs of 1942. You must shout Jai Parkash Narayan Zindabad." The crowd repeated this slogan. Proceeding she said, " there is no occasion for rejoicing over the removal of restrictions on me. Until all the political prisoners and

detenues are released, I shall not consider myself free. The truth is that I feel myself less free than I felt before January 25, 1946 when I was underground and refused to recognise the laws of the British Government that stand in in the way of our struggle for freedom. By all means raise slogans of freedom but under no circumstances there should be any glorification of my personality. I am but a humble and disciplined soldier of India's great and unfinished fight for freedom." Continuing she said, " So far I have been working from behind the *purdah* and have now come out in the open to serve you. The guiding star of my work is the same that inspired thousands of workers in 1942. And on the face of the shining star are written in gold the two words—'Quit India' the words that transformed cowards into heroes and the heroes into martyrs."

GREETINGS FROM INDIA

After this Address Aruna with her husband drove to her residence—No. 2 Windsor Place. She found a big pile of letters and telegrams waiting for her. Mahatma Gandhi wrote—so you had your way. Expect your letter . . . Bapu.

Mr. Ashok Mehta wrote—Welcome from real to the unreal, from light into confusion.

Mr. Purshotam Das Tandon : Happy at

cancellation of warrants. Hearty welcome Country is proud of your brave stand.

Mr. Kallappa, Secretary, All India Trade Union Congress : let me congratulate Mrs. Asaf Ali. My hat off to her sufferings during her self-imposed exile.

5

ARUNA THE LEADER

TO THE PEOPLE OF DELHI

Aruna gave the following message to the people of Delhi. " Freedom is a misunderstood term to-day. While I feel overwhelmed by the warmth with which the people of Delhi have greeted me I wish them to know that for those who took part in the August rebellion, freedom from the police interference does not mean the return of civil liberties. So long as the leaders of the underground movement are not free the feeling of elation at the removal of restrictions on one individual would be a delusion." With an air of determination she added : "I have returned as a humble soldier of India's freedom. I shall continue to work for the liberation of my country with the same vigour with which I have so far been doing."

On being requested by the public to address a meeting, Aruna once again spoke to a vast gathering. Aruna dressed in a blue Khaddar saree started her speech by saying, " before I relate my story I want to tell you that since

I set my foot on the soil of Delhi my eyes have been searching for Satyawati. She is not in our midst to-day. Before you hear my report, you must think of Satyawati, the story of whose bravery, heroism and sacrifice is engraved in the mind of everyone of us." She asked the crowd to shout " Shrimati Satyawati Zindabad." For a moment Aruna could not speak, she felt chocked with tears. " Satyawati, you all must remember", she said, "had no other interest in life but the service of her countrymen. She worked and worked so hard during her life that the strain told on her health, and she became a total wreck. And when she lay on her death-bed her last words and thoughts were concentrated on the freedom of her counry. Though physically she is no more with us, yet her deeds will always be a source of inspiration to us all in our work . . . her bravery will sustain us in our moments of hesitation and her unquestionable sincerity will serve as a beckoning light on our arduous journey—the journey that will lead us to freedom." About her own story of her underground life she said, " It is a long tale which cannot be told at a public meeting. In a way you know that story, as you have taken a hand in writing it. It is a story that has been written by the people of India. The people of Delhi have played their part in the drama of August, 1942.

You know how the people of Delhi reacted to the arrest of our leaders. Nobody who has seen people being shot in the streets of Delhi during those days can forget the scenes when people were fired at in a most cruel and shameless manner. But with great pride I declare, that the people of Delhi gave a good account of themselves and our English rulers got so frightened that they did not stir out in the streets for three weeks. Standing here before you I salute these soldiers, and in a most respectful manner I pay my homage to those martyrs who for the honour of their motherland sacrificed their lives."

Raising her voice Aruna asked " For whom did these brave sons and daughters of India lay their lives ? For you and me is the obvious answer. They died so that we may live. And how are we going to honour those who fell in the battle of 1942 ? Are we just going to be content by raising slogans and putting flowers around their graves ? No." Said Aruna in the most emphatic way. " The best way to honour them is to continue the struggle in which they lost their lives."

Referring to her part in the August upheaval Aruna said "In obedience to Gandhiji's command, we raised the banner of open revolt in Delhi. To-day, I stand before you as the

symbol of those fearless men and women who generated speed in the giant wheels of Indian Revolution."

Continuing Aruna said, "leaders are necessary but leaders are the creation of the people. They cease to be leaders if they cut themselves from the people. The year 1942 has brought about an unprecedented psychological revolution."

UNDERGROUND EXPERIENCES

Aruna then explained the meaning and purpose of the part played by her. "It was not a game of hide and seek that I played for 40 months." The British Government, she continued, had made an attack on the great national organization which could be compared to the happenings at Pearl Harbour. The Government, however, did not correctly assess the strength of the people. They thought an unbridled wave of repression would frighten them, and damp their spirits. But the people of India stood upright and refused to bend the knee before the John Bull who had literally run amuck. As the top leaders of the Congress had been clapped into prison, the people became their own leaders."

" It was in these circumstances," said Aruna " that we took a resolve that as long as there is

breath in us, we shall not get ourselves shut up in the prisons of the enemy. It was a grim decision which should not be compared to a game of hide and seek."

The agents of the Government, said Aruna, hunted for them but if the doors of one house were shut against them, the doors of a thousand others were opened to them. Aruna denied the story that she had been going about in a *burqa.* " How can," she asked, "a soldier do her work in a *burqa* ? "

Aruna paid glowing tributes to those who had given her and her comrades shelter while putting their own lives in danger. She declared that the people of Bhagalpur, Midnapur, Satara and Assam hills had been very kind to them.

A women's organization in Delhi had arranged a tea party in Aruna's honour but she refused the invitation saying that it was not the time for tea parties. She wanted the womenfolk to think of her colleagues who were still underground and help by collecting funds for them.

ARUNA DIFFERS

It might be recalled that in September 1945 when Wavell returned to India after having talks with the Cabinet members in connection with the political situation in India, every one felt optimistic about India's future. Even

Maulana Azad in a speech had said that freedom was fast approaching. Aruna who did not even agree with her husband where politics were concerned, criticised Maulana's views saying, "Maulana Sahib who is our respected leader said at this very place that freedom for which they had been aspiring was about to fall in their *jholis*. It pains me to enter into an argument with Maulana Sahib, but I respectfully want to say, it is not freedom that falls into a beggar's *jholi*. We are not prepared to stand before the British Government like beggars. We must think of the martyrs of 1942 and not think in terms of compromise."

Aruna even disagreed with the Viceroy's plan that the Executive Council during the period of transit would be so reconstituted as to command the support of the major political parties in India. She expressed her dissatisfaction in the following words. "If this was our objective we could have got it when Cripps came to India in 1942. We need not have kindled the fire of 1942 and raised the mighty slogan of Quit India. After raising our life-giving slogan we were not going to our rulers with a bowl in our hands. We will win freedom by our sacrifices."

She did not even agree with Pandit Nehru who had, in some of his latest speeches, said that he wanted to see the tri-coloured flag flying on

the Red Fort. She said that she had the greatest respect for Jawahar Lal Nehru but the speeches he had made had pained her. "This Red Fort," said Aruna, "is a constant reminder of our national humiliation. Every stone of this evil and monstrous structure serves us with a daily reminder of humiliation of Bahadur Shah. It was in this building that the last of our independent rulers was presented with the heads of his sons. Could there be a worse and a more heinous example of butchery?

"Such being the ugly memories of this Red Fort, how can we tolerate even for a second the sight of this murder house where hundreds of our patriots have been done to death?"

Aruna declared that the National Flag should be hoisted, not on the Red Fort but on the Imperial Secretariat where ordinances after ordinances were manufactured in 1942 to suppress the rising of the people of India when their leaders were in Ahmednagar jail.

Concluding she said, "the path we have chosen is a difficult one. It is not a bed of roses all along the road. There are pitfalls whose jealous jaws greedily gape to swallow people alive. Then there are sharp thorns laid by the bureaucracy to prick our naked feet. Then the journey which we have chalked out for ourselves will be a long and an arduous

one. It is beset with nerve-shaking difficulties. Many of our comrades will get tired and will not be able to keep pace with us. But we should not indulge in recrimination. We should be tolerant to those who in spite of their best efforts, drop out on the way. Everyone will not be in the firing line. But let those who want to kiss the bullets, kiss them. Let those who want to carry the hangman's rope around their necks, as a garland of flowers, have the privilege of wearing it. We should not drag down those who want to serve India by embracing the ugly shadows of death. It is their right to do it and it is our duty to stand by them........ to lighten the burden of their work................to clear them on their way to self immolation. Such are the people who are the pride of India........the truest sons and daughters of their mothers........the joy of this life and the glorious heritage of our ancient civilization."

VISIT TO THE VILLAGES

The villagers of Mehroli, Gheasa, and Bhawana in Delhi province had the proud privilege of seeing Aruna during her short visit to these villages. Every man, woman and child flocked to greet her. She knew most of them personally because during the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1940, she had often toured these

villages. Much as she wanted to spend a few days with them she could not, as she had some important work hanging on her shoulders at Delhi.

WOMEN MUST WORK WITH MEN

Aruna addressed a large gathering of women in Delhi. She related to them how badly the womenfolk were treated by the British Government during the days of August rebellion. Not only the women who took part in the movement, but also the relations of the underground workers were tortured. She paid glowing tributes to those who had stood firm against all odds.

Women, she said, must work side by side with men. Women in every land have played the rightful part in the progress of their country. In Russia, thousands of women fought in the front-line trenches and in China they enrolled themselves as guerrillas. " Why should in India, my sisters keep on darning their husbands' socks, or while away their precious time in idle gossip ? "

Aruna laid the following four-fold programme before her attentive listeners :

(*i*) Every woman should enlist as a four anna member of the Congress and organise herself under one flag.

(*ii*) Every woman should volunteer her full time services to the Congress.
(*iii*) Every woman should do constructive work as outlined by Mahatma Gandhi.
(*iv*) Every woman should boycott foreign goods and launch intensive campaign to popularise Swadeshi goods.

Aruna warned her sisters that a bitter struggle to free India lay before them and that every woman should be prepared for this struggle adding, " our task is great and the time at our disposal is very small. We do not know what amount of sufferings and sacrifices are still needed for the liberation of the country. The women of India should be prepared to play their noble part in the coming struggle."

Aruna said she wanted them to remember Satyawati, who was the first woman to go to jail for the sake of her country. She said that she regretted that she and her co-workers had failed to collect one lakh of rupees required for the Satyawati Memorial Fund. She reminded the collectors that not a penny from the capitalists was to be accepted for this fund. Satyawati, said Aruna, had worked for the people so the people should contribute towards the building up of the Memorial. "This Memorial will keep her memory green, it will be a source of inspiration to us all and the tale of her sufferings,

which this Memorial will always be relating, will sustain us in our exacting struggle to drive away the British from the soil of India—the chaste soil which their guilty feet have long enough desecrated."

TO THE STUDENTS

Aruna has always been popular with students. When she addressed the students of Delhi they were so much impressed by her speech that after the meeting they not only took a pledge to boycott foreign goods but about five hundred students decided to launch a campaign in every street of Delhi to popularise Indian goods.

She expressed her appreciation on the part the students had played in the August movement. They had, she said, left their schools and colleges and had plunged into the struggle whole-heartedly. She defined the students' role in 1942 as defiant and protesting and not revolutionary. Now was the time for them to organise on a sound revolutionary basis. The organization of the students would enable them to develop 'resisting element" for the next struggle, therefore absolute efficiency in organisation was essential. The country, she said, wanted a body of trained and disciplined soldiers and not vague agitators.

HER OLD HOUSE RESTORED

It may be recalled that when Aruna was declared an absconder, her house was attached by the Government and her Baby Austin had been auctioned. It was now announced that her house would be restored and the sale proceeds of the car would be handed over to her.

While addressing a meeting of the mill workers at Delhi Aruna asked them to unite and to stand by the Congress. She paid a tribute to the workers who had played a great part in India's struggle for freedom. She did not blame those workers who had not helped because she knew fully well that the Communists had set them on the wrong tract. "Whenever we called upon the workers to strike, those agents of British Imperialism came forward with their slogans of 'people's war' and tried to break the strikers. It was an unmanly thing on their part to do as we were working from behind the scene and those betrayers of the great national cause were working in the open and could approach you individually. They succeeded in many places to persuade you to resume your work. I, for one, do not blame you but these henchmen of the foreign Government." She appealed to the workers to beware of the Communists and look to the Congress as their best friend.

6

AT THE FEET OF GANDHI

EN ROUTE TO WARDHA

Gandhiji in response to Aruna's telegram asked her to see him at Wardha. She left Delhi on February 7, and according to the wishes of the Secretary of Nagpur Congress Committee stopped for some time at Nagpur. She received a hearty welcome at the railway station. Later, she addressed a public meeting where about 30,000 people were present and told them that they should be prepared for the final struggle for freedom and see that their country was free within one year. Speaking about the British Imperialism in India, she said that the villagers must first drive out the agents of the British Government, then their leaders would see that the Britishers quit India. Speaking as a participator in the 1942 movement, she declared that India even to-day was not a free nation.

" The Congress workers must penetrate into the villages to build up unit formations of Indian National Army. An Azad Hind Government should be established in the villages,

on the basis of this constitutional structure. The veterans of Indian National Army should form the nucleus of an Azad Hind Army, establishing contacts with the masses of the people. In India we have to form a real and effective Azad Hind Government to shape our destiny and all those who praised Subhas Chandra Bose ought to work for this purpose zealously."

She added, Gandhiji's constructive programme had not been faithfully and earnestly carried out. If it had, it would have hastened the achievement of their objective of freedom. But people only raised slogans and shirked the responsibility of working. Instead of being ready to make sacrifices they passed their lives in comfort.

Referring to the British Government's attitude towards the acts of violence which were being committed against the Britishers she said the Indians would not yield to British threats. She said that Mahatma Gandhi alone could ask for an explanation from those who had diverted from the path of non-violence but no Britisher had the right to talk of non-violence to Indian people.

Concluding Aruna said, "I am going to meet our leader Mahatma Gandhi at Sewagram and discuss with him all the doings of August 1942

movement. We shall also discuss preparation for the next final struggle for India's freedom."

PRODIGAL ARUNA RETURNS

It was after the evening prayers that Aruna met Gandhiji. The scene reminded one of the return of the prodigal son. For more than one hour she related to him all that she had been doing during her underground life. As Gandhiji wanted to have further talks with her he asked her to prolong her stay by two days.

On the following day Aruna addressed a meeting at Wardha. Wardha, it might be mentioned, was the home town of Seth Jamna Lal Bajaj and he had offered the village of Sewagram to Mahatma Gandhi for building his *Ashram*. Aruna paid glowing tributes to the memory of the Seth who had given Gandhiji a chain of his bungalows for Congress work such as, Indian Village Industries, the All India Spinners Association and a host of others.

Not only had he given money, said Aruna, but he had even sacrificed his life for the Congress. Many a time he had courted imprisonment and during his last imprisonment he had fallen so ill that even after his release he could not recover. "This princely hearted Seth was a true

soldier in the fight for freedom and was a faithful follower of Mahatma Gandhi who regarded him as one of his trusted colleagues. He was not only the maker of Wardha, but also of modern India."

Turning to Mahatma Gandhi Aruna said : " He is the man who has made women fearless and bold. It is he who has given the women of India an opportunity to play their part in liberating India. He is truly the father of the Indian nation and it is the duty of one and all to march under his banner."

Aruna on her second meeting with Mahatma Gandhi discussed the ways and means for the re-organisation of the Congress, while Gandhiji instructed her about the future Congress work. Discussing the food situation, Aruna said that the people would not face the famine and die as the people of Bengal did in 1943.

Before leaving Wardha Aruna addressed a large gathering. She spoke to them about the famine which was fast approaching and suggested that the Congress should organise "grain bands" in every village. Continuing she said, "the Quit India demand becomes a live issue again. The impending threat of mass deaths due to food shortage is the result of callous indifference on the part of the ruling power. The Bengal famine taught it nothing.

"The stimulated concern of Lord Wavell during the Bengal famine notwithstanding, scarcity on a vast scale looms ahead. Let us not await death with folded hands. Let us tell every peasant that he is the master of his grain and that this alien Government has no right to snatch away his produce.

" We must here and now organise ourselves and create the requisite authority for challenging the right of Lord Wavell's administration to save India." She said " the Congress could, if it wanted, set itself as a parallel authority in the country. By co-operation with the British Govenment in such moments of national crisis we merely strengthen its hold.

" Remember the slogan of 1942. 'Fight for food is the fight for freedom.' Not a grain to feed the rulers, not a pie for the British goods."

Cryptically said Aruna, " without food one cannot live to fight, hence people should fight to live."

7

ARUNA ARGUES WITH GANDHI

DUTY FIRST

Aruna, who had become very weak in health instead of taking rest and spending some quiet time with her husband whose health was also deteriorating, felt it her duty to devote whatever time she could spare to her country. She knew the spectre of famine was looming over the face of India, there was unrest among the labourers, then the election campaign on behalf of the Congress had to be conducted. So Aruna, after considering all these points decided to tour the whole of India. Wherever Aruna went she attracted big crowds.

HINDU-MUSLIM PROBLEM A FARCE

Speaking of the Hindu-Muslim problem in India Aruna told the people of Nagpur: "I do not concede such a thing as a Hindu-Muslim problem. All this is a farce. What I find," she said, "is a fight among a certain section of the people for loaves and fishes of office."

It may be recalled that the Congress had tried its best to come to terms with the League leaders and Aruna had always cried halt to the

Congress policy of appeasement. And now once again she told her elders that the Congress appeal to the Muslims should be made to the Muslim masses instead of the Muslim leaders and she expressed her fullest confidence that such an appeal when made would get great response.

BUSY ARUNA

Aruna had a special fascination for the people of Bombay. When on the day of her arrival in the town she was requested for an address she readily agreed. A reception was accorded to her by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. She spoke to the crowd for more than one hour. Recalling her underground life Aruna said that they had resolved on the day the Congress Committee adopted the Quit India resolution to continue the struggle for the freedom of the country. She declared, "even though the Congress might not have officially sponsored the Quit India movement we believed that the Congress had given the call and we readily responded to it." Continuing she said, "we might have faltered on the path and we might have been caught by the police and locked up behind the bars, but the battle for freedom continued. Forty crores of Indians who had risen in revolt were determined to

free our country from the fetters of British Imperialism. If our leaders who could guide us in our freedom movement were taken away from the people and locked up inside the cells, the only possible means of continuing the struggle was by some of us going underground. Our only aim was to see the country liberated and the British rule in our country completely liquidated."

Referring to the British Government's move in making an offer of a National Government and a Constituent Assembly, Aruna warned the people that the British Government was preparing a new trap to keep their hold on India in tact. She said that the British Government had realised that they had to change their tactics in dealing with the people of India. It therefore held out this bait to our leaders to bypass the main demand of freedom to this country. "Our leaders think," she said, "that freedom for our country is soon coming and the British Government is earnest in granting freedom to our country." Aruna stated that she, however, had no faith in the *bonafides* of the British Government.

While in Bombay, Aruna was a very busy person. She had to meet her old acquaintances, discuss the future plans of work and the problems facing India with her co-workers, and address various organizations who pressed her for

a message. Aruna told the students of Bombay that it was the duty of those who had that political education to impart it to the kisans and workers and thereby make them fit and ready for the country's fight for freedom. Referring to Pandit Nehru's declaration that preparations of a psychological nature were necessary, she said that even though she agreed with him, she felt that something more in the nature of a positive action was essential. Emphatically she declared, "we have no place to-day for mere intellectuals. We want practical people who can carry the message of independence throughout the whole length and breadth of the country."

Some students asked Aruna to address them in English because their knowledge of Hindustani was very meagre. Expressing her inability to do so, Aruna said : "Hindustani being our national language is the language which can give weight to our ideal of independence and I have promised Gandhiji that in Hindustani alone shall I address gatherings."

ADVICE TO R.I.N. RATINGS

The respect the people of India had for Aruna was revealed when the Indian naval ratings went on strike. Their demands which they had placed before their authorities having been refused they stood up in revolt and

challenged the British authorities to shoot them if they dared. This was the first time that the Indian seamen had revolted against the discriminatory treatment meted out to the Indians in comparison to that of the white-skinned seamen. The strikers after three days of looting shops, smashing offices and setting fire to military trucks and trains placed their faith and trust in the hands of the Indian leaders, so that something might be done for them. Aruna who was also approached gave them her advice in the following words :

" Almost 15,000 naval ratings of the R.I.N. have struck work and refused to eat canteen food since Sunday evening. Their demands are essentially legitimate. They have insisted that the inequalities in the scale of pay, allowances and food between the R.I.N. and R.N. should cease.

" They have protested against the appointment of British officers and their insulting and unsufferable behaviour towards the Indian personnel in the navy. These service conditions and economic demands are quite naturally unaffected by the high tension political climate of to-day. At least young Indians in the services are no longer prepared to submit sheepishly to the hectoring and swearing of their British rulers.

" Be that as it may, I earnestly hope that the strikers will not permit unco-ordinated and spon-

taneous action to mar the otherwise disciplined move they have made for the removal of their grievances. Solidarity and discipline are the first essentials of success in all collective action of this nature. They must formulate their demands precisely and conduct their struggle with dignity. Care should be taken to eschew injury to person or property in this action. The naval ratings must conduct negotiations through their respective ship committees *viz.*, their Central Naval Strike Committee.

"The naval authorities should note that at the instance of the representatives of the strikers I am giving this advice. I am sure that the Congress, the Labour and the Student Organisation of Bombay will extend their moral support to their legitimate demands.

"It is the first occasion when such an overwhelming number of the Indian seamen have undertaken collective action with such effects. Firmness, discipline and unity on the part of the strikers and the pressure of public opinion should result in a successful conclusion of this spontaneous strike."

The strike situation, however, worsened. A complete *hartal* was observed in Bombay and the mill hands of Bombay struck work as a mark of sympathy with the naval ratings. The Bombay police and military had to resort to firing to

disperse the violent mobs that paraded the streets. In fact the whole city of Bombay presented an ugly picture.

Realising that the situation was out of control, Aruna sent a telegram to Pandit Nehru asking him to visit Bombay and thus save the naval strike from heading towards a climax. The telegram ran—"Naval strike tense. Situation serious climaxing to grim close. You alone can control and avoid tragedy. Request your immediate presence in Bombay."

Pandit Nehru at that time was in Garhwal conducting the election campaign and was completely cut off from the newspaper world. It was only when he returned to Allahabad that he learnt about the serious developments in Bombay. He immediately cancelled his election engagements and went straight to Bombay.

Aruna in the meantime went to Poona to meet Gandhiji. She had a ninety-minute talk with him about the R.I.N. ratings.

Clement Attlee, the British Prime Minister, broadcast a stern warning to the mutineers to surrender unconditionally. He had further ordered the British warships to proceed to Bombay and bombard the ships under the control of the mutineers if they refused to surrender. But the arrival of the British warships changed the complexion of the situation. So far as the

mutineers were concerned they were prepared to die fighting. But knowing too well that the repercussions of this open fight will be terrible and far-reaching in the Indo-British relations they approached Sardar Patel and he gave them the following advice.

"In the present unfortunate circumstances that have developed the advice of the Congress to the R.I.N. ratings is to lay down arms and to go through the formality of a surrender which has been asked for.

"The Congress will do its level best to see that there is no victimisation and the legitimate demands of the naval ratings are accepted as soon as possible. There is considerable tension all over the city and there has been loss of life and property.

"There is also considerable strain, both on the naval ratings as well as on the authorities. While fully appreciating their spirit and courage and also having full sympathy in their present difficulties, the best advice that the Congress can give them, in the present circumstances, is to end the tension immediately. This advice is in the interests of all concerned."

GANDHI-ARUNA CONTROVERSY

The R.I.N. ratings listened to the advice of the Congress leaders and surrendered unconditionally.

The terrible anarchy that had prevailed in Bombay pained Mahatma Gandhi. For thirty years he had been preaching non-violence and now he found that there were violent tendencies in the minds of people. He expressed his feelings in the following statement.

"I have followed the events now happening in India with painful interest. This mutiny in the navy and what is following is not, in any sense of the term non-violent action.

"Inasmuch a single person is compelled to shout Jai Hind or any popular slogan, a nail is driven into the coffin of *Swaraj* in terms of the dumb millions of India. Destruction of churches and the like is not the way to *Swaraj* as defined by the Congress. Looting and burning of tramcars and other property, insulting and injuring Europeans, is not non-violence of the Congress type, much less mine, if and in so far as it may be different from the Congress.

"Let the known and unknown leaders of this thoughtless orgy of violence know what they are doing and then follow their bent. Let it not be said that India of the Congress spoke to the world of winning *Swaraj* through non-violent action and belied her word in action and that too at the most critical period in her life.

"I have deliberately used the adjective thoughtless, for there is such a thing as thought-

ful violent action. What I see happening now is not thoughtful.

"If the Indian members of the navy know and appreciate the way of non-violent resistance it can be dignified, manly and wholly effective, if it is corporate. For the individual it always is. Why should they continue to serve if service is humiliating for them or India? Action like this I have called non-violent non-co-operation. As it is, they are setting a bad and unbecoming example for India.

"A combination between Hindus and Muslims and others for the purpose of violent action is unholy and will lead to and probably is a preparation for mutual violence, bad for India and the world.

"The rulers had declared to quit in favour of Indian rule. Let the action be not delayed by a moment because of the exhibition of distressful unrest which has been lying hidden in the breast. Their might is unquestioned. Its use beyond the bare requirements will be unworthy and even wicked if it is made to suppress the people or a portion of them. The latter have been far too long under the foreign rule."

Aruna after reading this, issued a rejoinder refuting Gandhiji's statement and the Mahatma gave the following reply.

"I congratulate Shrimati Aruna Asaf Ali on

her courageous refutation of my statement on the happenings of Bombay. Except for the fact that she represents not only herself but also a fairly large body of underground workers, I would not have noticed her refutation only because she is a daughter of mine—not less so because not born to me or because she is a rebel.

"I had the pleasure of meeting her on several occasions while she was underground. I admired her bravery, resourcefulness and burning love of the country. But my admiration stopped there. I did not like her being underground. I do not appreciate any underground activity. I know that millions cannot go underground. Millions need not.

" A select few may have the fancy that they will bring *Swaraj* to millions by secretly directing their activity. Will this not be spoon-feeding? Only open challenge and open activity is for all to follow. Real *Swaraj* must be felt by all, man, woman and child. Labour for that consummation is true revolution. India has become a pattern for all exploited races of the earth because India's has been an open unarmed effort which demands sacrifice from all without inflicting injury on the usurper. The millions in India would not have awakened but for the open unarmed struggle. Every deviation from

the straight path has meant a temporary arrest of the evolutionary revolution, I do not read 1942 events as does the brave lady. It was good that the people rose spontaneously. It was bad that some or many resorted to violence. It makes no difference that Shri Kishorelal Mashruwala, Kaka Saheb and other workers, in their impassioned zeal for the moment misinterpreted non-violence. That they did so, only shows how delicate an instrument non-violence is. My analogy is not meant to cast any reflection on any person. Everyone acted as he or she thought best. Supineness in the face of overwhelmingly organized violence would have meant cowardice. I would be weak and wrong if I failed to give my estimate of the doings of 1942.

"Aruna would rather unite Hindus and Muslims at the barricade than on the constitutional front. Even in terms of violence, this is a misleading proposition. If the union at the barricade is honest, there must be union also at the constitutional front. Fighters do not always live at the barricade. They are too wise to commit suicide. The barricade life has always to be followed by the constitutional. That front is not a taboo for ever. Emphatically it betrays want of foresight to disbelieve British declarations and precipitate a quarrel in anticipation.

Is the official deputation coming to deceive a great nation ? It is neither manly nor womanly to think so. What would be lost by waiting ? Let the official deputation prove for the last time that British declarations are unreliable. The nation will gain by trusting. The deceiver loses when there is correct response from the deceived.

" Let us face facts. The coming Mission is claimed to be a friendly mission, entertaining the hope that they will discover a constitutional method of delivery. But the problem is knotty, probably the knottiest that has ever confronted statesmen. It is possible that the mission will put forth an insoluble conundrum. So much the worse for them.

" If they are intent upon finding an honest way out of the difficulties of their own creation, I have no doubt there is a way. But the nation too has to play the game. If it does, the barricade must be left aside at least for the time being. I appeal to Aruna and her friends to make, wise use of the power their bravery and sacrifice has given them.

" It is a matter of great relief that the ratings have listened to Sardar Patel's advice to surrender. They have not surrendered their honour. So far as I can see, in resorting to mutiny, they were badly advised. If it was for

grievance, fancied or real, they would have waited for the guidance and intervention of political leaders of their choice. If they mutinied for the freedom of India, they were doubly wrong. They could not do so without a call from a prepared revolutionary party. They were thoughtless and ignorant if they believed that by their might, they would deliver India from foreign domination.

"Aruna was right when she said that the fighters this time showed grit as never before. But grit becomes foolhardiness when it is untimely and suicidal as this was.

"She is entitled to say that the people 'are not interested in the ethics of violence or non-violence but the people are very much interested in knowing the way which will bring freedom to the masses—violence or non-violence.'

"The people have, however, imperfectly, hitherto gone the way of non-violence. Aruna and her comrades have to ask themselves everytime whether the non-violent way has or has not raised India from her slumber of ages and created in them a yearning, very vague perhaps, for *Swaraj*. There is, in my opinion, only one answer.

"There are other passages in Shrimati Aruna's statement which, as it appears to me, betray confusion of thought. But their treatment

can wait.

"Needless to say that I have dealt with the message believing it to represent her opinion. If it does not, I apologise to her in advance. My argument, however, is not affected, even if it is found that the reporter has not correctly interpreted her's. For my argument is, after all, impersonal and directed only to the portions which are calculated to mislead the public, irrespective of their authorship."

INDONESIAN DAY

Aruna Asaf Ali presided over the Indonesian National Day meeting organised by the Indonesian Students Committee in India at Chowpatty. In her short speech Aruna said that she was sorry that Indians could send mere words of sympathy to their valiant Indonesian brethern. India could best help Indonesia by freeing herself. She revealed that the Indonesian Freedom Movement was started by a woman—Miss Kartini. To-day, the Indonesians had their own republic under the leadership of Dr. Soekarno.

BACK TO BENGAL

The situation in Bombay having eased as a result of the unconditional surrender by the R.I.N. ratings, Aruna decided to leave for

Calcutta as she had promised the people of Bengal that she would revisit their province as soon as she was free.

At the Howrah Railway Station Aruna was garlanded on behalf of the B.P.C.C., B.P.S.C. Socialist Association, E.I. Railwaymen Union, Rubber Factory Workers Union and Chatkal Mazdoor Union. From the station she drove direct to Mr. Manubhai Bhimani's residence to condole with Mr. Bhimani's old parents who were in bereavement owing to the death of their son-in-law.

On the following day Aruna addressd a mammoth meeting of railway workers at the Mogul Bagan Maidan which was presided by Professor Humayun Kabir.

Aruna in the course of her speech told them that strike was indeed a very effective weapon in the hands of the railway workers who were discontented because their legitimate demands had not been fulfilled. But that in order to win their battle they needed unity, solidarity and organization.

Aruna warned them that the British Government would not hesitate to use force on the railway workers to break their morale. But no matter what came from them it was for the railwaymen to demonstrate through their solidarity, organization and iron-determination

that they were not to surrender until their cause triumphed.

She appealed to the railway workers to place their grievances before the Congress Working Committee prior to resorting to *hartal* just as the Bombay ratings had done.

In the end Aruna called upon the workers to stand by the Congress and to strengthen the great patriotic organization.

CALL FROM AZAD

Aruna had originally planned to tour Bengal and Assam extensively, but on receiving a telegram from Maulana Azad asking her to proceed to Delhi she cancelled her Chittagong Students Conference programme and also curtailed her Assam tour.

She spoke to the people of Gauhati (Assam) about the policy the Congress ministers should follow during their tenure of office. She said that they should bear in mind that the Quit India issue over which the elections were fought will not have been carried out while British bureaucracy, military and the vested interests are entrenched everywhere."

Referring to Gandhiji's faith in office acceptance Aruna said, "this faith was a revolutionary factor. Gandhiji has the hope that his constructive programme can receive an impetus by the

Congress ministeries working it. This faith, if it was justified, must mean giving the programme a practical shape as the country was awaiting the unfolding of that plan."

She expressed her thought that the Congress Ministry in Assam would not be anything different from the Saadulla Cabinet or Section 93 Administration.

She asked the Congress ministers to win the Muslim hearts by action and for the removal of hatred by which the League leadership was functioning.

LEAGUERS MOB ARUNA

At Munsgung Railway Station a large crowd of Muslim Leaguers mobbed Aruna with lathis and brickbats. The angry mob demanded Pakistan from her and although the Leaguers were very provocative Aruna remained unruffled and quietly listened to all that they had to say. After they had finished Aruna told the Leaguers that they should go to the British for wresting Pakistan. She said, "Who am I to give you Pakistan? I am but a humble servant of the nation. I have no power in my hands to make a gift of anything to anybody. The power is in the hands of the British Government."

Then the crowd asked her to join the Muslim League. Aruna frankly refused. She

added that she would not join the Muslim League because of Nizamudin Ministry's misdeeds, involving not only deaths of Hindus but millions of Muslims.

After her hurried tour of Assam Aruna returned to Calcutta and after a few days left for Delhi by air. Although Mr. Jinnah happened to be travelling by the same plane, he did not exchange a word with Aruna.

ARUNA MEETS AZAD

Immediately after her arrival in Delhi Aruna had a long talk with the former Congress President. After the talk she told the pressmen, "I told the Congress President that the ratings' strike was spontaneous. In seeking redress of their grievances by resorting to strike and by wanting Congress intervention they have overstepped the convention and regulations governing the armed services. But in view of the war to peace time transition problems prevalent in the services and the disturbed political atmosphere the authorities would have been well advised to take the advantage of Sardar Patel's role as a mediator and not come out with provocative action. I was summoned by the Congress President to Delhi in order to give him an eye witness account of the R. I. N. strike and subsequent happenings in Bombay.

and elsewhere. I hope that only such a technical step will be taken against the R. I. N. ratings as may be necessary to satisfy the regulations and formalities." Concluding Aruna said "the navy in free India with its own government would not have occasion to resort to mutiny for removal of service grievances and racial discrimination."

BONE OF CONTENTION

Mahatma Gandhi in an article in the *Harijan* entitled "Conflict of ideas" answered the criticism of Aruna on his advice to R. I. N. ratings asking them to resign if their conditions were humiliating. Aruna in reply to the statement of Gandhiji had said that if the R. I. N ratings resigned they would have to give up their own means of livlihood. Moreover, they were fighting for principles. If they resigned now there would be hundreds, in these days of unemployment, to take their place who would be subject to the same discriminatory treatment and the R.I.N ratings would not have achieved anything. She felt that the Congressmen who were themselves going to the legislatures could not afford to ask the ratings to give up their jobs. Their representations would not help the cause of the country.

Mahatma Gandhi gave the following reply to

this trend of argument.

"The first principle of non-violent action propounded in the Congress resolution of 1920 at its special session in Calcutta under the presidentship of the late Lala Lajpat Rai is that non-co-operation with everything humiliating. It must be remembered that the R.I N. was founded not for the benefit of the ruled. The men went with their eyes open. Discrimination stares one in the face. It cannot be avoided if one enters the service which is frankly organised to keep India under subjection. One may, one ought to try to mend under the conditions. That is possible only upto a point. That cannot be achieved through mutiny. Mutiny may conceivably succeed, but the success can only avail the mutineers and their kin, not the whole of India. And the lesson would be a bad inheritance.

"Discipline will be at least as necessary under *Swaraj* as it is now. India under successful mutineers would be cut up into warring factions exhausted by the internecine strife.

"India of the Congress has made little headway in the appreciation of the fight for *Swaraj* if it is true that hundreds would take their places if the present ratings resigned in pursuance of their campaign against humiliation. Can we have *Swaraj* for the masses if we are so degraded that hundreds of us are ready to

swallow humiliation even to the extent of taking the places of humiliated fellowmen? The very thought is unworthy of Congressmen and that too at the moment when *Swaraj* is believed to be within sight.

"Those who hold that enlistment in the R. I. N. is their only means of livlihood must have a very poor opinion of themselves. A soldier's is a hard life. He is disciplined to work in co-operation and trained to work with the pick-axe and the spade. Such a one will disdain to think that apart from soldiering he has no means of livlihood. We have poor opinion of soldiers if we think that they cannot earn their bread by the sweat of the brow. A labourer is any day worthy of his hire. What is, however, true is that a soldier out of his calling will lack the glamour and the amenities provided for him. We have wasted precious twenty-five years if we have not stripped the possession of killing and destroying of the thick coat of varnish that has covered it for so long.

"Aruna Asaf Ali has been reported to have said that the ratings would have gained nothing by resigning. Well, they would have gained honour and dignity if they had manfully given up their jobs and taught the citizens of Bombay the way to save honour and dignity and they would have spared Bombay the senseless

destruction of life, property and very precious foodstuffs. Surely this would have been an achievement not quite beneath notice.

"The last statement of Congressmen going to the legislatures for conserving the honour and liberty of the country is not the same as ratings serving for their livlihood with the possibility of being used against their own countrymen and their liberty. Congressmen who go to the legislatures are representatives elected by their voters and they go even if it is only to prevent those from going who will misrepresent their voters. Going to the legislatures may be altogether bad, but there can be no such comparison as has been just averted to."

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ITINERANT ARUNA

PUNJAB—AT LAST

The Punjabis who are full of vitality and dynamic energy and are always ready for reckless, immediate action have a special attraction for young and rising leaders. Even Pandit Nehru, the ambassador of young India had remarked on one of his visits to Lahore that the gathering he had addressed in the capital of the Punjab was the largest that he had ever seen in his life.

Since the day of her emergence from the underground life Aruna had been pelted with requests from her co-workers of Punjab to visit their province. In spite of her best efforts she could not go to Lahore earlier than in the last week of March. On her way to Lahore at the Ambala Railway Station she was given a rousing reception. At night she addressed a meeting held under the auspices of Students' Congress. Lady Congress volunteers presented a guard of honour with tri-coloured flags. A number of purses and gold bangles were presented to her.

Aruna told her audience that Punjab was fortunate that Netaji Subhas Chander Bose had given the people the great gift of I. N. A. and that it was the bounden duty of the Punjabis to make the best use of this unique gift. The personnel of the I.N.A., she advised, should be absorbed in the Congress and taken by the Congress Committees. Naming the first three heroes of the Azad Hind Fauj, Aruna said, "Shah Nawaz, Dhillon and Sehgal should not waste their time in making speeches but they should get busy in bringing about perfect unity and harmony in the province. These men have lived in an atmosphere of unity of thought and unity of action. The inspired leadership of Netaji brought this miracle into being. It is for these people to tell their countrymen as to by what means and methods this unity is achieved. This first and foremost duty of these three symbols of courage, sacrifice and patriotism is to unite the people of this country and towards that end they must channelise all their energies."

At Chheharta, an important industrial colony, about five miles from Amritsar, Aruna addressed largely attended meeting. Painfully, Aruna referred to the failure of August movement in the Punjab. "The Punjabis" said Aruna, "were ready for the action. But their willing-

ness and enthusiasm could not be put into practice because of the weak leadership of the Congress in the Punjab. I am sure if the leaders had given the call the Punjabis would have responded in the same brave way as did the masses in other provinces. Besides it must not be forgotten that the Communists were responsible for the failure of the movement. They had turned traitors and had started helping the British war effort."

Revealing a secret of her underground activities Aruna said that at one time she was put in charge of the Punjab, N. W. F. P. and Sind zone for the organisation of the work. But she and her comrades found it difficult to work here because of the above mentioned reasons.

TRIBUTES TO BHAGAT SINGH

On March 24, Aruna arrived in Lahore. She met the Congress and Socialist leaders and had long talks with them. Then she addressed a large body of Congress, Congress Socialist and Student workers at the Bradlaugh Hall. She received a great ovation as she entered the hall. Aruna paid glowing tributes to the memory of Bhagat Singh. "It was Sardar Bhagat Singh," said Aruna, "who had taught the people the revolutionary spirit. He was one of the most fearless people that India has produced. He

did not want to escape the gallows by giving an undertaking that he did not believe in violence. He was an utterly truthful person. The work which Bhagat Singh had started for India's freedom was yet incomplete. More than twenty years have passed but the goal for which he sacrificed his life has not yet been reached, though its vision inspires us all in our efforts. It is the duty of each one of us to strive every fibre of our nerves for the attainment of that cherished goal—the goal that promises the liberation of our down trodden-masses........the goal that will usher in an era of freedom from want and fear." Referring to the formation of the Coalition Ministry in the Punjab, Aruna said that it was a very diplomatic move on the part of the Congress. She asked the people to forget the past policy and the atrocities committed by Sir Khizar Hayat at the instance of the British Government. The Coalition Ministry had to face two enemies........the British Government and the Muslim League. The Ministry should put such a programme which would make the Punjab Muslims feel that it was the Congress which was really their well wisher and not the Muslim League.

COMMUNISTS EXPOSED

It may be recalled that Aruna had always

criticised the attitude of Communists and had spoken against them in all her speeches. In one of her speeches she had said, "while the country was burning in this gigantic life and death struggle, the Communists, who pretend to be revolutionaries, were siding with the British to strengthen their imperialist hold. They are nothing else but traitors. These Communists betrayed the country at a moment of grave need. They tried to mislead the country by raising the false and meaningless slogan of 'people's war.' But I am glad that the country has now realised their real character. All their efforts to explain their anti-national thesis of 'people's war' has miserably failed as it was expected to fail."

In a speech delivered at the Howrah Railway Station Aruna had made serious allegations against the Communist workers. She alleged that some volunteers who advised peasants to seize food during the last Bengal famine had been arrested by the police on information supplied by the Communists.

In another speech Aruna had vehemently condemned the Indian Communists for the statements they had made against Netaji Subhas Bose, adding, "our so called patriots had the effrontory to call him a puppet in the hands of the Japanese. And they had the barefacedness

to denounce him as the 'advance guard of Tojo.' There was not a derogatory objective that they did not use against the Indian National Army which had unleashed the sword from the frontiers of India to drive the British out. The brave men of the Azad Hind Fauj suffered and suffered so that from the womb of their sufferings the babe of Indian freedom may be born. Who does not know that there were suicide squads in the I. N. A., the members of which unit carried dynamites to blow up the enemy tanks. They carried death around their waists. They, for the honour of Mother India, challenged the will of God in fixing the hour of their death.

"It is a matter of positive shame that such fearless sons of India were damned by the Communists as traitors. It is not the soldiers of the I. N. A. who were traitors, but the Communists who maligned them and those mercenary and begging officers and soldiers who resisted them when they set their foot on the sacred soil of India.

"The soldiers of the Azad Hind Fauj are like the Jewels worthy to adorn the neck of Mother India and all those Indians who stood in their way, whether in the front line or in the rear, are like the stones to be thrown into the dust bin."

About the recent change in the policy of the Communists towards the British Government Aruna said, "times have changed now. Russia, the god father of our Indian Communists has now become once again hostile to Britain. There is a clash of interests between Russia and Britain and how can our patriots side with Britain when Russia is working against that country. These Communists to-day are thinking in terms of struggle and marshalling their forces against the Congress. I want my countrymen to be aware of their machinations." And now once again she warned the people of Lahore "the Communists are enemies at home. Beware of them. They betrayed the revolutionary forces in 1942."

CABINET MISSION IN INDIA

When the British Cabinet Delegation arrived in India, Delhi became the centre of political activities. All the Congress leaders flocked to Delhi to see for themselves the important negotiations that were going to take place. Aruna also returned to Delhi as she wanted to watch the political drama closely. Besides, Maulana Azad had decided to stay at Asaf Ali's residence so she had to look after the comforts of the Maulana whose health since his release from the Ahmednagar jail had not been

too good. Although Aruna had to entertain the members of the Working Committee who held their meetings at her house occasionally, she never neglected her own party work. She wrote articles for the Party paper called *Janata* every week. During the Tripartite Conference she went to Simla for a few days.

The Congress Socialist Party, ever since the official announcement by Lord Pathic Lawrence that a cabinet delegation was coming to India to negotiate with the leaders of Indian opinion for the transference of power to India, had been severely criticising this political mission. Aruna and her party felt that the Cabinet Delegation was coming to India just to gain time and to create further and greater differences among the political parties in India.

Aruna had stated that the British Cabinet Delegation had not come to deliver freedom to India but to play the mediator between the Congress and the League. The British had created the so called differences and that they were still trying to exploit them.

REJECT THE PROPOSALS

When the Congress Working Committee in its resolution dated May 24, 1946 issued from Delhi rejected the short-term proposals for an interim Government Aruna expressed her

satisfaction at the rejection and dissatisfaction at the acceptance of long-term proposals. She said that the acceptance of the Constituent Assembly scheme foreshadowed many dangers. As the Constituent Assembly was far from the original idea of such an Assembly, it fell short of their aspirations. She maintained that the Constituent Assembly being a creation of the British it could never bring them freedom for which they had been fighting. Although the British Government had promised to accept the Constitution drawn up by the Constituent Assembly it would, nevertheless, be pulling wires in such a manner as not to allow the Indians to frame a Constitution which will be in consonance with wishes of the Indian people. She added that there were bound to be differences of opinion between the Congress and the League during the process of Constitution making. In such a case the contending parties will have to go to the British Government for the settlement of their rival claims. She added that the Constituent Assembly could only succeed if it worked in a free atmosphere and that there could be no free atmosphere in India so long as British troops continued to be stationed in India. The best course, according to Aruna, was to strengthen the Congress Organization first and then to start a fight against the British Government and

compel them to quit India.

At the A. I. C. C. Session held at Bombay on July 7, 1946, to ratify the Congress Working Committee's Delhi decision, Aruna, who is a member of the All-India Congress Committee, opposed the resolution and said that the policy of the Working Committee, since the release of its members had been out of tune with the spirit of Quit India resolution. The British power could only be overcome by a physical struggle and not by parleys and negotiations. Power by the people must come through their own struggle and strength.

If a Referendum were taken today, she said, the people would resent the present policy of the Congress High Command as it was one of co-operation with the British. The Congress acceptance of a Constituent Assembly was a triumph for British post-war political plans. Realising their old method of repression it could no longer succeed in the changed circumstances. The British had changed their strategy, but they had not changed their hearts. The Working Committee had by its decision reduced itself to the status of the Muslim League which was the most reactionary political body in India.

The Congress demand of a Provisional Government had still to be met. The Constituent

Assembly's suggestion was not acceptable to people, because it was being summoned by the British power, before the people had captured the citadel of power. She said she wondered how the British Government, which allowed Mahatma Gandhi to fast and die in the Agha Khan Palace in spite of the country wide demand for his release, could ever come before Mahatma Gandhi and offer whatever he wanted. It was an inconceivable thing.

Concluding her speech Aruna addressed Mahatma Gandhi and said, "we have listened to you all these years and it is now your duty to obey us."

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru while answering some of the criticism of the opposition party said he was pleased to hear the fiery speech one of the women members had made. It was indicative, he said, of the temper of Indian womanhood. He said more and more opportunities should be given to the Indian women to participate in our public life.

MILL WORKERS STRIKE

On July 8, about 15,000 workers of the Delhi Cloth Mills went on strike as a protest against the refusal of the mill authorities to recognise the Textile Mazdoor Sangh and their refusal to accept the arbitration of the dispute by

an independent *Panchayat.* Yet the mill owner, Sir Sri Ram, declared that the strikers had no legitimate grievances. In a statement to the Press he had asserted that the strike was not the result of economic reasons but was prompted by political groups who were trying to gain control over the political workers Aruna, who is the President of the Textile Mazdoor Sangh, contradicting his statement said that the Sangh enjoyed the overwhelming support of the general body of workers employed in the Delhi Cloth Mills and therefore the question of political rivalry did not arise. Moreover, if the strikers had no legitimate grievances the mill authorities should have had no objection in placing the demands before an arbitrator. The fact that they did not do so clearly proved that they were conscious of the strength of the labour's case. After fifteen days of strike Mr. Asaf Ali, President of the Delhi Provincial Congress Committee, intervened in the matter. The result was that the mill owner, Sir Sri Ram, recognised the Sangh and agreed to refer the dispute to arbitration. Aruna, the President of the Sangh, called off the strike on July 22.

Aruna Asaf Ali with her moving speeches had arrested the ardent fervour of independence in the minds of many a youth. She with her message of courage, defiance and action had

gained popularity in the student world.

A TRAGIC INCIDENT

During her tour to Sind, Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali visited Shikarpur. A 16-year old lad named Ali Gohar Brohi was eager to see Aruna but his elder brothers despite his requests, would not take him to the public meeting which she was to address. Ali Gohar, however, managed to reach the place of the meeting. Being unable to get near enough to the dais, Ali Gohar climbed up a high tree and saw Aruna. The branch of the tree on which he was sitting suddenly gave way and Brohi fell down and was seriously injured. When Aruna heard the story she visited the hospital and was visibly moved by the youth's enthusiasm. The boy died the same evening.

IN MADRAS

Aruna's admirers in Bombay presented her with a purse of over Rs. 1,00,000 as a mark of appreciation of her services to the country.

In the last week of August Aruna arrived in Madras and spent twenty-one days touring the whole province. During her one-day visit to Madras she had a very busy programme. First of all she had to perform the opening ceremony of a reading room in honour of Jaya Prakash

Narayan. Then she visited the exhibition of I. N. A. achievements and addressed the inevitable public meeting. The crowd consisted mostly of railway workers and students. Aruna told them that the Congress should mobile labour within its ranks if the country were to be purged of strikers and labour unrest. She continued, "all talk of a Kisan and Mazdoor Raj sounded so hollow because the Congress had not so far enlisted labour and integrated its cause within Congress policy."

Even the 1942 movement, said Aruna, did not prove of any immediate use because there was no synthesis between the Congress and the labour movement. It was therefore high time that the Congress enlisted labour if only to see that it was not misled by "extraneous forces and organizations."

RESOLUTION OPPOSED

At the A. I. C. C. session held at Meerut on November 22, 1946 "the social butterfly" had developed into a serious and a sober woman. She walked about the pandal, impatient to see India free. She was seen arguing with many Congress leaders but her brow every time, relaxed with a smile.

Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya warned this "impatient patriot," "we are on the turning

corner and the safety rule lays down that at the turning corner every motorist must drive slowly and be ready to apply brakes at a second's notice."

In the course of the A. I. C. C. proceedings Sardar Patel moved the second resolution of the session ratifying the Working Committee's and the A. I. C. C.'s decisions leading to the formation of the Interim Government. Referring to the Muslim League he said, "what was being done to-day was with the object of getting the Congress out of the Interim Government. We shall not allow ourselves to be caught in this net. We joined the Government with the full and firm determination to remain there. We have no intention of leaving it ourselves. The only way to make us leave it is to dismiss us or to convince us that continuance in it is futile."

Aruna opposed the resolution saying, "we should have met to-day to approve a complete abandonment of the path of compromise." She referred to Tilak, Gandhi and other personalities and said that revolutionaries like them had succeeded every time they came into conflict with orthodox Congressmen. Only recently had there been no victory of the revolutionaries.

Sardar Patel replying reiterated his conviction that the sword must be met by the sword. Mahatma Gandhi has said that it was better to

use violence than to be a coward. Non-violence, said Sardar Patel, was a weapon which it was beyond the power of an ordinary man to use and therefore, he urged the people to adopt violence in self-defence and only in self-defence or in defence of neighbours. He gave this advice because there was no Government at the Centre at present. The present Central Government during the transference of power was in a state of paralysis.

Mrs. Aruna Asaf Ali opposing Sardar Patel's resolution said "the Interim National Government is neither national, nor a government, nor even will it prove to be interim."

When Asaf Ali was appointed Minister for Communications (war transport and railways) in September 1946, the gulf already existing between Aruna and her husband was widened. They were both heading for the same goal but both had chosen a different path. In December when Asaf Ali was asked to proceed to America as India's Ambassador, Aruna declared that she had no intention of leaving the country for sometime and that she might go later on if she felt entitled to a holiday.

IN LAHORE AGAIN

Aruna on her way to Kashmir, where she was going on a study tour, stopped for a day in

Lahore. She was accorded a cordial reception at the Lahore Railway Station. In the afternoon she addressed a Press Conference. Expressing her views on the formation of a Constituent Assembly she said, "after all that has happened, my personal view is that the Constituent Assembly should assume full powers of a sovereign body and declare itself to be so. It should ignore the Parliament, become a Sovereign Statutory Authority and declare India's Constitution. Not only that. The Interim (Provisional Government was the phrase used) Government should take over complete charge of the Government of the country and call upon the military and civil sections of the administration and the Indian people to declare their allegiance to the sovereign free Government of India—instead of owing their allegiance to the King."

She left for Jammu that same evening.

The Executive Committee of the Punjab Provincial Hindu Sabha which met on the following day adopted the following resolution unanimously.

"The Sabha views with great alarm that portion of the resolution moved in the Constituent Assembly which affects the Indian States because in its opinion this resolution would remove from the map of India only Hindu Ruler States and will not affect in any manner

the Muslim Ruler States. The Sabha feels that the policy of the Congress towards Indian States is one-sided because on the one hand Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and other Congress leaders encourage those elements in Jammu and Kashmir which are antagonistic to the Maharaja, on the other hand in Hyderabad the Hindu *satyagrahis* are asked to give up their agitation. The Sabha is also greatly perturbed over the visit of Mrs. Asaf Ali to Kashmir at the time when elections to Kashmir Assembly are being held and requests His Highness' Government not to swerve from its previous policy of not allowing outside elements to interfere in the affairs of the state. In the event of these outside elements persisting in their anti State activities, the Sabha assures His Highness of its full support and help."

EXPERIENCES IN STATES

Aruna after seeing the state of affairs for herself in Jammu and other places in Kashmir, and having heard accounts of the doings of, what she described as, the "Royalist Party created by Premier Kak," advised the Kashmir National Conference workers to boycott completely the Kashmir Praja Sabha elections and to non-co-operate with the State authorities in that matter. She was shocked to find the manner in which

official interference was going on in the election campaign. She felt that there would be no free and fair elections in the Kashmir valley because more than two hundred leaders and workers of the National Conference were in jail. "But I must say that the real villain of the peace is not even the Premier Kak but the political department which is using Kak as a puppet," said Aruna in a grim voice.

The members of the Royalist Party which had been organised under the Kak regime had planned to break up all the meetings Aruna was to address. In the course of a statement to the Press she said, "with abusive slogans, lathis, stones and knife attacks they sought to intimidate us. The Magistrates on duty, policemen in uniform and police informers in plain clothes were directing them in a brazen-faced manner. But when the officials realised that neither threat of bodily injury nor personal insult would deter us from holding our meetings they thought that discretion was the better part of valour and retired."

By Aruna Asaf Ali's arrival in the State, Section 144 was imposed overnight in important centres and an official warning was given to the people not to participate in the meetings. In spite of all this Aruna addressed nine meetings.

She wanted to stay there for a longer time but she had to return to Delhi to keep up her other appointments. Besides she had to report to the Congress High Command and also to Dr. Pattabhi, Working President of the All India States People's Conference and take a trip to Hyderabad Deccan.

On her return journey Aruna again stopped for a day in Lahore. While addressing a Press Conference at the Bradlaugh Hall, Aruna related all that she had seen and heard and pointed out that she merely wanted to suggest to the National Conference workers what she felt and it was for them to decide upon their future course of action. She, however, felt that under the circumstances which existed in the State then, it would be a miracle if even one of the nominees of the National Conference succeeded.

The staff of the North Western Co-operative Society approached Aruna, the wife of the Railway Member of the Government of India, with their grievances. Aruna after listening to them issued a statement pointing out that the staff of the N. W. Railway Co-operative Credit Society, had not drawn their pay since October, 1946 as a protest against the non-payment of interim relief sanctioned

by the general meeting of the share holders of the Society in February, 1946. She expressed her hope that the higher authorities would look into the matter.

On January 21, Aruna arrived in Hyderabad Deccan by air. She was received at the airport by the local Congress leaders. In the evening she addressed a meeting of workers organised by the Hyderabad Mazdoor Sangh.

STRONG-HEADED ARUNA

When it was officially announced that Asaf Ali, the first Indian Ambassador to America, would leave India by the end of January Mahatma Gandhi wrote to Aruna advising her to accompany her husband. Asaf Ali, however, postponed his departure to February 7, but strong-headed Aruna declared that she would join him in the United States in April.

She, however, left Delhi by the same plane as Asaf Ali and went with him as far as Karachi.

At Karachi while addressing a public meeting at Rambaugh recreation grounds she said, "Why am I not going to Washington with my husband ? This is the question which confronts me wherever I go. In return I ask, is it possible for a mother to leave her ailing child ? India is sick and passing through critical times. The signs are clear to those who can see. Gandhiji

has buried himself in Noakhali for nothing. The final battle for India's freedom has yet to be fought. How can I leave my country without finishing my programme?"

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